



SOUTHOLD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This Comprehensive Plan is the official public document to be used to guide the development of our community. In New York State, the comprehensive plan provides the basis for the zoning and other land use regulations found in the Town Code. Southold Town's Comprehensive Plan has recently undergone an update, culminating with the publishing of this plan in 2019. The newly revised Comprehensive Plan is designed to shape future updates to the Town Code and policy decisions regarding the appropriate use of the Town's resources.

Essential to this Comprehensive Plan is its Vision Statement, which represents the desires and aspirations of the Town's residents and forms the framework that guides the entire process. It is the collective product of town stakeholders and underpins the Comprehensive Plan. The vision recognizes the Town's cherished assets—including its pastoral landscapes, expansive natural resources, and small-town quality of life—and mandates a future that preserves them. The entire text of the Town's Vision Statement can be found in Chapter 1, "Vision Statement & Introduction."

Adoption of the Plan by the Town Board

The Southold Town Board proposes to adopt the Southold Town Comprehensive Plan to use as a guide for the future management of the Town's expected growth and for encouraging economic activity suitable to the Town's character.

History and Description of the Plan

Since completion of the first comprehensive plan in the late 1970s, there have been many additional plans and studies, and the Town Board has implemented many of their recommendations. Some of the more comprehensive planning efforts include the Southold Town Stewardship Task Force Final Report in 1994, the Blue Ribbon Commission for a Rural Southold of 2002, the Comprehensive Implementation Strategy of 2003, the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) completed in 2004, and the work undertaken to produce the 2007–08 Hamlet Stakeholder Initiatives. These plans were all worthwhile efforts and provided an important focus for certain issues, but none was broad enough in scope to be considered a comprehensive plan on its own.

The vision and goals of these past plans, studies, and reports are carried forward into this Comprehensive Plan, which was written in collaboration with the residents and other stakeholders through an unprecedented number of public input meetings. Major goals identified include retaining the rural character that residents and visitors value and ensuring that farming continues as a major aspect of the Town. Issues currently facing the Town, e.g., development pressure; traffic congestion; limited housing supply for workers; and the need to preserve resources of natural and historic significance.

The plan includes the following chapters:

- 1 Vision Statement & Introduction
- 2 Demographics
- 3 Land Use & Zoning
- 4 Transportation & Infrastructure
- 5 Community Character
- 6 Natural Resources & Environment
- 7 Economic Development
- 8 Housing
- 9 Agriculture
- 10 Land Preservation
- 11 Human Services
- 12 Natural Hazards
- 13 Parks & Recreation

This Comprehensive Plan consolidates the Town's goals into one place, making them easier to find. This document provides detailed objectives for accomplishing the goals and assigns responsibility for the objectives to ensure they can be implemented.

Implementation and Updating of the Plan

The Town Board will prioritize the goals and pursue implementation of this plan.

As a living document, this Comprehensive Plan will be updated as needed by changing or revising individual chapters or individual goals. Continuous updating of smaller portions at any one time will ensure the document stays relevant over time, and make it unnecessary to attempt an update of the entire plan all at once.

Some chapters of the plan have associated appendices that contain further insight into how the goals and objectives of the plan were formulated.

Southold Town: Defining Features

Southold Town is geographically distinctive, a long and narrow peninsula located in southeastern New York State, in the area known as the North Fork of Long Island. Its mainland averages three miles in width in the western portion of the Town, and narrows considerably on the eastern end. The entire Town, including its islands, is 54 square miles in size, with 163 linear miles

of coastline. The Town is composed of 10 hamlets—Cutchogue, East Marion, Fishers Island, Greenport West, Laurel, Mattituck, New Suffolk, Orient, Peconic, and Southold—and numerous islands, the largest of which are Fishers Island, Plum Island, and Robins Island. Each hamlet boasts its own distinctive character; however, overall they are more similar than different and share common elements.

2 Demographics

This chapter provides the metrics and sources that underpin the predictions and recommendations of the goals and objectives throughout this plan.

3 Land Use & Zoning

This chapter sets the tone for the rest of the chapters and details the primary concerns of the Town's residents, including the desire to preserve as much farmland and open space as possible and the wish to retain its small-town feel, which can in large part be determined and maintained through land use patterns and zoning. The chapter provides an overview of current land use and zoning and presents broad goals for future land use and zoning to achieve the vision in this plan. In addition, a discussion of how future development would be possible under the current regulations, also called a "buildout analysis," is presented, and the development trends affecting the Town are discussed.

The first three Town-wide goals (1 through 3) relate to the updating of the Town Code and the Town Zoning and enforcing of the Town Code. They are intended to encourage a major revision to the Town Code to improve its clarity, and ensure that zoning is appropriately located, consistent with other goals of the plan, and will protect quality of life for residents and visitors. Goals 4 through 13 are broad; each concept receives one chapter devoted to it in this plan. These 10 goals are:

- Improve traffic congestion and safety and ensure infrastructure supports the residents and businesses of the Town.
- Protect the character of the Town.
- Protect and enhance the natural resources and environment of the Town.
- Economic prosperity.

- Enable the creation of attainable homes.
- Retain and advance the business of agriculture.
- Continue to preserve farmland and open space.
- Continue to provide quality human services.
- Prepare the Town for natural hazards.
- Continue to provide quality parks and recreation opportunities in the Town.

Finally, each hamlet receives an individual summary of its land use and zoning and a treatment of its particular goals and objectives. Included in the hamlet-specific discussions are the long-term goals identified in the 2007–08 Hamlet Stakeholder Initiatives, as well as current issues identified by the public over the course of the many meetings that have been held for this plan. The separate review of each hamlet shows that there are similarities to be found among all the hamlets, but that each has its own individual character. The unique nature of each hamlet must be considered in future zoning and land use decisions.

4 Transportation & Infrastructure

This chapter provides an inventory and assessment of existing transportation systems and infrastructure, and an assessment of the future transportation needs and opportunities. The first topics discussed are planned/expected changes such as currently proposed transportation improvement projects and previously recommended traffic calming improvements, and the continuation of current trends like tourist-season-related traffic congestion, annual traffic growth, truck traffic growth due to increased delivery demand, and the proliferation of ride-sharing travel using smartphone apps. Next, the additional traffic growth that could materialize should the buildout of available parcels within the Town be developed under existing zoning is addressed.

The main transportation goals are as follows:

- Reduce the traffic congestion experienced during the peak tourist season.
- Reduce future traffic congestion expected due to future development.
- Increase pedestrian, cyclist, and traffic safety.
- Expand bicycle network for enjoyment, health benefits, reducing congestion, and increasing road safety.
- Monitor management of aviation traffic and

airport expansion.

- Improve curbside management practices.
- Manage the effects of ferry ridership on traffic.

The infrastructure portion of the chapter provides utility infrastructure assessments for communications, stormwater, sanitary sewer, water, electricity, and natural gas. The goals for infrastructure address improving existing conditions, and how best to tackle future conditions in light of predicted growth.

5 Community Character

The goals and objectives contained in this chapter reflect stakeholder desires to shape the future of their home in a way that retains the community character of Southold Town and its hamlets. The three Town-wide goal areas are scenic resources, cultural resources, and natural heritage.

- For scenic resources, the goal is to preserve and maintain them through the enhancement of design standards and innovative site planning, preventing development sprawl and strengthening hamlet centers and residential neighborhoods.
- For cultural resources, including historic, architectural, and archaeological resources, goals include such objectives as identifying, documenting, and mapping the Town's historic resources; managing and preserving these resources; finding compatible use/reuse/ integration of such resources in future planning efforts; and promoting heritage tourism and public art, crafts, and cultural entertainment in the hamlet centers.
- For natural heritage, the goal is a focus on elevating and preserving the Town's natural heritage and the people who interact with them; protections for ecological quality, town beaches and soils, aquifers, and air quality.

Each hamlet is represented with long-term Hamlet Stakeholder recommendations as they relate to community character and which stem from the work of the Hamlet Stakeholders' Hamlet Study Implementation Panel.

6 Natural Resources & Environment

Southold Town's ecological areas are among its most valuable assets. The Town's waters and lands are protected by numerous planning documents, multi-agency regulations, and designations that recognize the quality of the areas and provide management

strategies. In the future, management strategies will focus on protection, adaptation, and sustainability.

The “Water Resources” and “Land Resources” sections each has its own set of goals and objectives gathered from a series of planning initiatives, plans, studies, reports, and public input sessions conducted over the last 20 years.

- Main goals for water resources: a focus on conservation and protection of water, which includes water quantity and groundwater and surface water quality, watershed management, and freshwater and marine habitats.
- Main goals for land resources: involve the protection of soils, geologic features, upland habitats and trees, and fish and wildlife resources; monitoring and control of nuisance and invasive species; adaptation to climate change and sea level rise; conservation of energy; protection and improvement of air quality; and continuing to manage solid and hazardous waste.

An integral element of the management approach must include the implementation of an educational campaign to increase awareness.

7 Economic Development

This chapter addresses economic development that is appropriate for Southold. The following goals and objectives for the Town are based on extensive community input and consideration of its history, previous economic data collection efforts and development initiatives, changing demographics and the socio-economic status of residents, an inventory of its businesses, and other factors that affect its economy.

The five principal goals put forward are as follows:

- Encourage new and facilitate the growth of existing business sectors—including agriculture, aquaculture, health care, renewable energy, tourism, light industrial, retail/service-based, and the maritime-related industry—that pursue stable and sustainable employment.
- Promote economic development that ensures an adequate tax base without compromising the unique character of the Town.
- Preserve and improve the vitality of each of the

Town’s hamlet centers and HALO zones (aka the Hamlet Locus Zone, an area surrounding and including the hamlet centers) as walkable local business districts.

- Preserve and encourage industries that support existing and future agriculture and aquaculture uses.
- Preserve, encourage, and continue to support existing and future maritime uses—including fishing-related industries, marine trades, marine biology, marinas, recreational boating support uses, and related uses—as an important business sector within the Town’s economy.

These goals are all accompanied by objectives that seek to find customized approaches to the most viable ways to achieve the goals. Objectives draw on the area’s past history or traditions, desires for future direction, and specific and distinctive needs for the various hamlets, and take into account groups and associations that may already be working toward the goals or that could help attain the goals.

8 Housing

The lack of affordable housing options is at crisis proportions in Southold Town, and the goals of the Housing chapter reflect this concern. Safe and affordable housing is vital to a community’s stability and growth. Increasing the amount of affordable housing to help sustain its year-round residents is a goal of the Town; in 2010, fewer than 10 percent of the housing units were year-round rentals. In addition to the scarcity of market-rate rental housing, subsidized rental housing units administered by the North Fork Housing Alliance have remained stagnant through the years, despite the rising number of residents needing rent subsidies to afford to remain in their communities. Finally, safe and affordable housing is also needed for the vulnerable citizens in our population. Seniors, people with special needs, people in recovery from substance abuse, and the homeless may need subsidized housing options.

The principal goals for housing are as follows:

- Create affordable housing.
- Promote awareness about housing issues.
- Retain residents in existing housing.
- Protect quality of life.

- Develop best practices in housing.

9 Agriculture

Agriculture plays an integral part in the economy, land use, and character of Southold Town. Approximately 30 percent of its 33,350 acres are in farmland, with agriculture and related businesses represented in the top five economic engines of the Town's economy. The goals of the Agriculture chapter are therefore intended to keep farming and farmland as well represented and robust in the future as they are currently. To this end, the goals seek to:

- Retain and advance the industry of agriculture.
- Protect prime agricultural soils from depletion, removal, and excessive erosion.
- Promote best management practices for the use of agricultural pesticides and herbicides to protect groundwater and surface water resources.
- Promote improved agricultural yields through nuisance wildlife management.
- Promote best management practices to prevent the movement of crop disease and pests from one location to another.
- Protect public safety by ensuring there is adequate parking and traffic control on private property at retail agricultural operations.

10 Land Preservation

Southold Town's residents have historically been in favor of land preservation to maintain the Town's farmland and open spaces. In addition to outright purchases of land and farmland development rights, the Town is exploring additional methods of preserving land. These include subdivision regulations that require clustering to create open space, as well as incentive-based, voluntary programs to reduce density.

Nearly 27 percent of the total land area of Southold Town is protected from development, and a nearly equal amount—also approximately 27 percent—of its total land area is available for development, with more than half of the land available for development currently categorized as farmland.

Following are the principal goals relating to land preservation in Southold Town:

- Protect farmland, with an overall goal of retaining at least 8,000 acres in agriculture.
- Continue to preserve open space lands, especially those with high-quality natural resources.
- Continue to preserve lands for active recreation.
- Ensure proper land stewardship of land preserved with the Town's funds.

11 Human Services

Southold Town has provided human services for over four decades to foster community responsibility and social equity. The goals of the Human Resources chapter therefore take into account the demographic trends of Southold Town and the needs of its most vulnerable residents. In recent years, the Town has seen an increase in senior citizens, and the Hispanic population, accompanied by a downward trend in household income for year-round residents and funding from governmental sources.

The goals as related to human services reflect these varied needs:

- Continuing to provide and enhance services for seniors and youth.
- Improving employment opportunities for town residents.
- Providing expanded and diverse recreational, educational, and leisure experiences and programs.
- Improving the Town's transportation options.
- Supporting underserved populations, minorities, and households living in poverty.
- Coordinating human service delivery and establishing educational programs about services available.
- Identifying and assisting residents with behavioral health needs.

12 Natural Hazards

Southold Town is subject to natural hazards that can imperil human lives, property, and the environment. Within the last century, the Town has witnessed significant weather-related occurrences including numerous hurricanes, tropical storms, severe thunderstorms, and nor'easters. The hazards from these storms include flooding, wind damage, shoreline erosion, and tornados. Other natural hazards that

occur, and are predicted to re-occur, are drought and extreme temperatures.

Planning and preparing for natural hazards can and will help save lives and property. To this end, the Town proposes the following main goals related to natural hazards:

- Mitigate the effects of natural hazards to achieve coastal resiliency.
- Protect public safety and reduce economic loss.
- Complete a Post Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction Plan.
- Provide education to the public relating to natural hazards.

13 Parks & Recreation

This chapter provides an inventory of existing parks and recreation in the Town and addresses future needs for recreational, educational, and leisure opportunities for Southold's residents and visitors. The principal goals related to parks and recreation are as follows:

- Provide diverse programming to meet the varying needs of the community.
- Enhance the utilization of existing parks, open spaces, and recreational areas through maintenance, stewardship, and facility improvement.
- Obtain additional land for recreational purposes.
- Ensure access to recreational areas.
- Promote health and wellness community-wide.

